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# Comprehensive Sex Ed in Illinois

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An in-depth guide to implementation  
compliance and common questions on the  
**Keeping Youth Safe and Healthy Act**

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Illinois

# Comprehensive Sex Ed in Illinois

An in-depth guide to implementation compliance and common questions on the **Keeping Youth Safe and Healthy Act**

Comprehensive sexual health education in schools equips students with the tools they need to be safe and to support responsible decision-making about their well-being. We can all agree, sex ed should be more than a conversation about the birds and the bees. Sex ed gives students the information and skills they need to make healthy decisions at every point in their lives, for the rest of their lives. Using this guide, we hope you will learn more about implementation and compliance with the Keeping Youth Safe and Healthy Act. The guide will help answer questions you, your community, or your students might have about KYSHA.

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## WHAT IS THE KEEPING YOUTH SAFE AND HEALTHY ACT?

The Keeping Youth Safe & Healthy Act, sometimes referred to as KYSHA, is a piece of legislation that passed through the Illinois Legislature and was signed into law by the Governor in August 2021, becoming Public Act 102-0522.

By amending and updating the existing sexual health education references in the Illinois School Code, KYSHA establishes the requirement for the way in which public and charter schools across Illinois teach comprehensive personal health and safety in grades K-5, and updates the requirements for comprehensive sexual health education in grades 6-12, if they are taught in their schools. The act requires the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) to develop and adopt learning standards to include, but not be limited to, all of the National Sex Education Standards (NSES) on or before August 1, 2022. The State Board of Education went through a rigorous process with staff and communities to explore adopting learning standards above and beyond the NSES, and determined to only adopt the National Sex Education Standards as the new Illinois learning standards for sexual health education effective July 13, 2022. Later in this document, you will read about local control for what discretion schools and districts are able to implement when teaching personal health, safety, and sexual health education.

This law, like the previous law passed in 2018, is not a mandate but is an “if, then” model, meaning Illinois schools are NOT required or mandated to teach sexual health, personal health or safety education, but if they do, they must follow guidelines created by educational experts. KYSHA requires that if sex education is offered in schools, educators must teach comprehensive sex education that is age, culturally, and developmentally appropriate, medically accurate, complete, inclusive, trauma-informed, and replicates evidence-based or evidence-informed programs. Illinois law previously only required education to be age-appropriate, evidence-based, and medically accurate. All these terms will be explained in greater depth in this guide.

The Keeping Youth Safe and Healthy Act does not prescribe the teaching of one specific curriculum. Rather, as was the case before utilizing local control, each school district may use or adapt curriculum to the specific needs of their school community as long as all instruction and materials, including any provided or presented by outside individuals or organizations, do not conflict with the law. Under the Keeping Youth Safe and Healthy Act all curriculum and education must be comprehensive and must align with the National Sex Education Standards, including information on consent and healthy relationships, anatomy and physiology, puberty and adolescent sexual development, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation and identity, sexual health, and interpersonal violence.

Further information on specific criteria for course material and instruction can be found on the [bill language text](#), starting on page 10 through page 12.



Throughout this guide, underlined text links to additional information which you might find useful. Find links used throughout this guide, and other resources at: [www.aclu-il.org/KYSHAResources](http://www.aclu-il.org/KYSHAResources).

If you have any questions about KYSHA or this guide, please reach out to [advocacy@aclu-il.org](mailto:advocacy@aclu-il.org).



## WHAT ARE THE NATIONAL SEX EDUCATION STANDARDS?

The National Sex Education Standards, or NSES, was developed by national leaders in health education, including Advocates for Youth, Answer, and SIECUS, in consultation with a diverse group of professionals with expertise in child and adolescent medicine, sexuality, public education, public health, social justice, and psychology. The National Sex Education Standards are a set of guidelines that outline the minimum, essential, core content and skills for sex education in K-12 schools in the United States.

The National Sex Education Standards were developed to address the inconsistent implementation of sexuality education across the United States. Recognizing limited teaching time and varying resources, these standards aim to provide clear guidance on essential content and skills for sexuality education in grades K–12. By normalizing sexual development and offering evidence-informed recommendations, they support schools in improving academic performance and ensuring age-appropriate education. These Standards provide guidance for schools when designing and delivering sex education that is planned, sequential, and part of a comprehensive school health education approach. Common Core Standards and CDC Health Curriculum heavily influenced the development of the National Sex Education Standards.

The NSES offer clear, concise recommendations for school personnel on what is age-appropriate to teach students at different grade levels. The standards translate an emerging body of research related to school-based sex education so that it can be put into practice in the classroom.

The National Sex Education Standards are broken down by both topic strands and grade bands. These standards outline what needs to be taught, including:

- **Consent and Healthy Relationships**
- **Anatomy and Physiology**
- **Puberty and Adolescent Sexual Development**
- **Gender Identity and Expression**
- **Sexual Orientation and Identity**
- **Sexual Health, and**
- **Interpersonal Violence**

## COMPLYING WITH THE KEEPING YOUTH SAFE AND HEALTHY ACT

The Keeping Youth Safe and Healthy Act continued an “if, then” model of implementation, not an educational mandate, which can make the nuance of compliance more complicated for teachers, schools, administrators, and districts to understand. Furthermore, there is overlap in some areas of comprehensive personal health, safety, and sexual health education with other educational mandates in Illinois. This document will explore those intersections further.

What is important to know is that to be in compliance with KYSHA your curriculum and lessons must both align with the NSES learning standards on what to teach, as well as how to teach, and the requirements outlined by the law. You do not have to teach every lesson in every grade. There are recommendations within this guide if you feel you are not able to teach all the outlined areas across each grade band or topic strand.



## NATIONAL SEX EDUCATION STANDARDS TOPIC STRANDS

Compliance with the Keeping Youth Safe and Healthy Act means teaching curriculum that aligns with the National Sex Education Standards. The standards break down lessons into a number of different topic strands. Comprehensive education will cover each of the following topic strands, in an age-appropriate manner:

**Consent and Healthy Relationships:** Functional knowledge and essential skills students need to successfully navigate changing relationships among family, peers, and partners. Special emphasis is given to personal boundaries, bodily autonomy, sexual agency and consent, and the increasing use and impact of technology within relationships.

**Anatomy and Physiology:** Functional knowledge students need to understand basic human functioning.

**Puberty and Adolescent Sexual Development:** Functional knowledge and essential skills students need to understand pivotal milestones for every person that impact physical, social, and emotional development, and that sexual development is normal and healthy.

**Gender Identity and Expression:** Functional knowledge and essential skills students need to address fundamental aspects of people's understanding of who they are as it relates to gender, gender identity, gender roles, and gender expression as well as how peers, media, family, society, culture, and a person's intersecting identities can influence attitudes, beliefs, and expectations, and the importance of advocating for safety and equity.

**Sexual Orientation and Identity:** Functional knowledge and essential skills students need to address fundamental aspects of people's understanding of who they are as it relates to sexual orientation and identity as well as how peers, media, family, society, culture, and a person's intersecting identities can influence attitudes, beliefs, and expectations and the importance of advocating for safety and equity.

**Sexual Health:** Functional knowledge and essential skills students need to understand STDs and HIV, including how they are prevented and transmitted, their signs and symptoms, and testing and treatment; how pregnancy happens, decision-making to avoid a pregnancy, and pregnancy prevention and options; and the personal and societal factors that influence sexual health decision-making and outcomes.

**Interpersonal Violence:** Functional knowledge and essential skills students need to understand interpersonal and sexual violence, including prevention, intervention, resources, and local services; emphasizes the need for a growing awareness, creation, and maintenance of safe school and community environments for all students.



## ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS ON HOW INSTRUCTION IS TO BE DELIVERED

If you are going to teach any personal health, safety, or sexual health education course materials and instruction must be: **age and developmentally appropriate**, **medically accurate**, **complete**, **culturally appropriate**, **inclusive**, and **trauma-informed**.

**Age and developmentally appropriate** means suitable to particular ages or age groups of children and adolescents, based on the developing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral capacity typical for the age or age group.

**Medically accurate** means verified or supported by the weight of research conducted in compliance with accepted scientific methods and published in peer-reviewed journals, if applicable, or comprising information recognized as accurate and objective.

**Complete** means information that aligns with the National Sex Education Standards, including information on consent and healthy relationships, anatomy and physiology, puberty and adolescent sexual development, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation and identity, sexual health, and interpersonal violence.

**Culturally appropriate** means affirming culturally diverse individuals, families, and communities in an inclusive, respectful, and effective manner, including materials and instruction that are inclusive of race, ethnicity, language, cultural background, immigration status, religion, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, and sexual behavior.

**Inclusive** means inclusion of marginalized communities that include, but are not limited to, people of color, immigrants, people of diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions, people who are intersex, people with disabilities, people who have experienced interpersonal or sexual violence, and others.

**Trauma-informed** means to address vital information about sexuality and well-being that takes into consideration how adverse life experiences may potentially influence a person's well-being and decision-making.

The above definitions can be found in the text of the KYSHA law. Prior to KYSHA, law already was in place for education to be medically accurate, as well as age appropriate. Additionally, prior language supported adapting curriculum for use with demographic, ethnic, linguistic, or cultural groups. For direct reference to the 2018 language, please refer to Public Act 100-0684.





# COURSE MATERIALS AND INSTRUCTION

Additionally, there are several affirmative requirements of how instruction and material should be structured to comply with the law. Instruction and materials shall be:

- + evidence-based or evidence-informed
- + inclusive and sensitive to the needs of students based on their status as pregnant or parenting, living with STIs, including HIV, sexually active, asexual, or intersex or based on their gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, sexual behavior, or disability
- + be inclusive of and may not be insensitive or unresponsive to the needs of survivors of interpersonal violence and sexual violence
- + be accessible to students with disabilities, which may include the use of a modified curriculum, materials, instruction in alternative formats, assistive technology, and auxiliary aids

Finally, there are a number of guardrails around what instruction and materials cannot do. To be in compliance with the Keeping Youth Safe and Healthy Act, instruction and materials cannot:

- reflect or promote bias against any person based on the person's race, ethnicity, language, cultural background, citizenship, religion, HIV status, family structure, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, or sexual behavior
- employ gender stereotypes
- proselytize any religious doctrine
- deliberately withhold health-promoting or life-saving information about culturally appropriate health care and services, including reproductive health services, hormone therapy, and FDA-approved treatments and options, including, but not limited to, Pre-exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) and Post-exposure Prophylaxis (PeP)

While the Illinois State Board of Education is not able to formally recommend or endorse curriculum, they are required to provide resources on their [website](#).

The Keeping Youth Safe and Healthy Act Coalition strongly recommends utilizing the Advocates for Youth, [3Rs curriculum](#). Advocates for Youth, which is one of the expert organizations who supported the development of the National Sex Education Standards, has written their curriculum to be in compliance with the NSES and has further created resources and materials for compliance for Illinois schools when teaching KYSHA. One of the benefits of using the Advocates for Youth, 3Rs curriculum is the abundance of resources, including lessons in Spanish and lessons adapted for students with physical and intellectual disabilities.

Additional resources and materials include:

- [Illinois Specific Curriculum](#)
- [Educator Resources](#) including a [Teacher's Guide](#)
- [Individual Lesson Plans](#), [Lesson Plan Summaries](#), and [PowerPoints for Lessons](#)
- [Lesson Selection Guidance](#)

## LESSON SELECTION

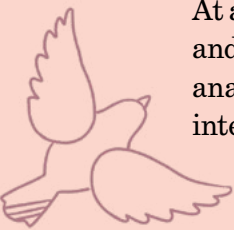
Though the National Sex Education Standards discuss the age- and developmentally-appropriate delivery of almost all topic strands in each grade band, it might not be realistic for a school or district to teach comprehensive personal health, safety, and sexual health education in every grade. Often teachers are faced with having fewer class sessions available to them to devote to sexuality education than is optimal. In these cases, it can be useful to have some guidance on which sessions to teach. Advocates for Youth has created [detailed lesson selection guidance](#). The purpose of this guidance is to assist educators in choosing the most appropriate lessons to teach if they are not able to cover all of them.

### K-2

In the Kindergarten – 2nd grade sequence, there are a total of 10 lessons, which cover five of the seven topics from the National Sexuality Education Standards. These lessons build in a developmentally appropriate and sequential way so that lessons in each grade build upon ones from previous grade levels. They take into consideration sequencing needs in grades K-2, important baseline concepts for lessons that will be taught in grades 3-5 and beyond, as well as which topics are prioritized at this level.

If educators have to be selective, personal safety and healthy relationships are two highly prioritized topics at the elementary school level as well as in higher grades, it is important to lay the foundation for later lessons that will build on the concepts of safety to include unwanted touch or attention, harassment and bullying, and sexual assault, as well as lessons that will help young people to distinguish healthy from unhealthy relationships, gain the skills to build strong relationships, and the ability to avoid or leave unhealthy ones. Lessons on gender roles are an important foundational lesson for future lessons regarding gender and gender identity and expression, and taps into a central developmental task of early childhood regarding gender role expectations. Lessons around understanding our bodies, sets the stage for later lessons on puberty and body integrity as well as for understanding reproduction and sexual health in upper elementary grades. Ideally, language about body parts should begin in kindergarten to start to develop a vocabulary and comfort with appropriate terms.

At a minimum, in grades K-2, lessons which provide a foundation for the concepts of personal safety and healthy relationships as well as introducing vocabulary related to sexual and reproductive anatomy will ease discussion in later, more involved lessons about puberty, reproduction, and body integrity as students age.





### 3-5

In grades 3-5, if having to be selective focusing on Personal Safety and Healthy Relationships while providing foundational information on puberty which is critically important at this developmental level, provides important information and introduces concepts essential for later discussions of pregnancy and sexual health. Educators should focus on skill building in combatting bullying, using refusal skills, communicating effectively, and advocating for the rights of others. These are skills that should be introduced early and are practiced again in the context of more advanced concepts related to sexual harassment, sexual assault, sexual pressure, abusive relationships, and LGBTQ rights in later grades. Teaching around puberty is an essential lesson for this age group and introduces concepts that are of high interest and applicability to fourth graders while also laying concepts for later lessons on reproduction and sexual health. When students near the end of this grade band it is important to teach to the connection between puberty and reproduction. This lays the foundation for later discussions related to sexual decision-making and sexual health. At this age, lessons related to identity build on previous lessons regarding treating others with respect and put it in the context of sexual orientation. By the end of this age band education should encourage young people to seek out information from trusted sources about the topic of sexual orientation. The introduction of this topic at this grade band makes subsequent discussion in later grades easier and more comfortable for students.

### 6-8

If the entire NSES topic strands cannot be taught in grades 6-8, there should be an emphasis placed on Pregnancy and Reproduction, Healthy Relationships, and STDs and HIV, in this grade band. Middle school lessons are built on concepts introduced in elementary school, address developmentally appropriate issues through building knowledge, healthy dispositions, and skills, and lay the foundation for lessons that follow in High School. If educators have to be selective, one of the key goals is to continue to build comfort with material and prepare students to seek information from reliable sources. In particular, lessons on Identity introduce new concepts related to sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender roles and expressions that students will explore in greater detail in high school.

### 9-12

The final grade band, which covers High School, grades 9-12, encourages educators who must narrow down the presented topics strands to focus on the topics of Pregnancy and Reproduction, Healthy Relationships, STDs/HIV, and Personal Safety, while also including foundational lessons in Identity and Puberty and Adolescent Development that emphasize new knowledge, skill development, body safety and integrity, and critical thinking related to information and decision-making.

## INTERSECTION WITH ERIN'S LAW AND THE CRITICAL HEALTH PROBLEMS MANDATES

As you learn more about the Keeping Youth Safe and Healthy Act it becomes clear that there are active educational mandates which overlap with some of what is outlined earlier. One of the most important things to note is that while the following two mandates might have similar educational context, KYSHA is the only law which discusses the age and developmentally appropriate, medically accurate, complete, culturally appropriate, inclusive, and trauma-informed ways in which material and instruction must be delivered.

**Erin's Law is an Illinois Public Act** that requires public schools to provide child sexual abuse prevention education for children in pre-kindergarten through twelfth grades. Public school districts must also adopt and implement a policy addressing sexual abuse of children. The personnel training must cover several things including how to speak to students about child sexual abuse prevention. The law mandates that school board policies addressing sexual abuse of children include “an age-appropriate and evidence-informed curriculum for students in pre-K through 12th grade”.

### Keeping Youth Safe and Healthy Act

- If Then Model, Not a Mandate
- Grade Bands from K-12
- Consent and Healthy Relationships
- Anatomy and Physiology
- Puberty and Adolescent Sexual Development
- Gender Identity and Expression
- Sexual Orientation and Identity
- Sexual Health
- Medically Accurate
- Complete
- Culturally-Appropriate
- Trauma-Informed

- Child Sexual Abuse Prevention
- Sexual Abuse and Assault Awareness
- Interpersonal Violence
- Age and Developmentally Appropriate
- Inclusive

### Erin's Law

- Mandated Education
- Pre K-5
- Reporting Abuse
- Prevention-Oriented
- Trusted Adult Model

**The Critical Health Problems and Comprehensive Health Education Act** in Illinois mandates that all elementary and secondary schools in the state must provide comprehensive health education programs that include instruction on various topics such as human ecology and health, human growth and development, the emotional, psychological, physiological, hygienic, and social responsibilities of family life, including sexual abstinence until marriage, the prevention and control of disease, including instruction in grades 6 through 12 on the prevention, transmission, and spread of HIV/AIDS, age-appropriate sexual abuse and assault awareness and prevention education in grades pre-kindergarten through 12, public and environmental health, consumer health, safety education and disaster survival, mental health and illness, personal health habits, alcohol and drug use and abuse, including the medical and legal ramifications of alcohol, drug, and tobacco use, abuse during pregnancy, evidence-based and medically accurate information regarding sexual abstinence, tobacco and e-cigarettes and other vapor devices, nutrition, and dental health.

### Keeping Youth Safe and Healthy Act

- If Then Model, Not a Mandate
- Grade Bands from K-12
- Consent and Healthy Relationships
- Puberty and Adolescent Sexual Development
- Gender Identity and Expression
- Sexual Orientation and Identity
- Sexual Health
- Medically Accurate
- Complete
- Culturally-Appropriate
- Inclusive
- Trauma-Informed

- Age and Developmentally Appropriate
- Anatomy and Physiology, Human Growth and Development
- Disease Prevention and Control, Including HIV
- Sexual Abuse and Assault Awareness
- Abuse During Pregnancy and Interpersonal Violence
- Sexual Abstinence

### Critical Health Problems and Comprehensive Health Education Act

- Mandated Education
- Human Ecology and Health
- Family Life Education
- Sexual Abstinence Until Marriage
- Public and Environmental Health
- Consumer Health
- Safety Education and Disaster Survival
- Mental Health and Illness
- Personal Health Habits
- Alcohol and Drug Use and Abuse
- Tobacco and E-Cigarettes
- Nutrition
- Dental Health

## LOCAL CONTROL

While the Keeping Youth Safe and Healthy Act worked to shift several pieces around comprehensive personal health, safety, and sexual health education, one thing it did not change was local control for districts to select the instructors, curriculum, and instructional materials for their students, if they choose to provide this education.

The Keeping Youth Safe and Healthy Act requires the Illinois State Board of Education to adopt the National Sex Education Standards as the Illinois Learning Standards for sexual health education. Per the law, districts have the option to provide sexual health education instruction. School districts that choose to provide instruction in sexual health education must develop or select a curriculum that is aligned with the new standards. School districts do not have the authority or autonomy to decide whether they will adopt the National Sex Education Standards, as those standards are what comprise the Illinois Learning Standards for sexual health education.

In the context of the Keeping Youth Safe and Healthy Act, local control refers to the ability of local school boards to make decisions about curriculum and instructional materials in their schools. This means that each school district can choose the curriculum that best suits their students' needs while still meeting the requirements of the law. A district that elects to teach comprehensive personal health and safety in grades K-5 and comprehensive sexual health education in grades 6-12 cannot adapt or change the state-adopted learning standards. A course in comprehensive personal health and safety and comprehensive sexual health education that is offered must incorporate all topic strands in the standards. Districts that elect to teach comprehensive personal health and safety and sexual health education may adapt curriculum as long as it complies with the law. Further, districts maintain local control over implementation, in who provides education and when. Guest lecturers or resource persons may be utilized to provide instruction or presentations on comprehensive personal health and safety education and comprehensive sexual health education. All instruction and materials, including materials provided or presented by outside consultants, community groups, or organizations, may not conflict with the provisions of the law.

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## OPPORTUNITY TO REVIEW MATERIALS

A school district shall provide individuals, such as parents or guardians, an opportunity to review the scope and sequence of instructional materials that the district is utilizing to teach a class or course in comprehensive personal health and safety education and comprehensive sexual health education. In addition, a school district shall annually post on its website which curriculum is used to provide comprehensive personal health and safety education and comprehensive sexual health education. Contact information, including email addresses, of school personnel who can respond to inquiries regarding course instruction and materials should also be posted.

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## OPT-OUT PROVISION

As previously shared in this document comprehensive personal health, safety, and sexual health education is not mandated in the state of Illinois. Because of this, under the law, parents and guardians can choose to opt-out their students from some or all lessons under KYSHA. Enshrined in the Keeping Youth Safe and Healthy Act, refusal to take or participate in comprehensive personal health, safety, or sexual health education can not be a reason for disciplinary action, academic penalty, suspension, expulsion, or any other sanction of a student.

It is important to note, there are certain educational mandates which overlap or intersect with some of the materials covered in KYSHA. Examples of these can be seen above, when discussing Erin's Law and Critical Health Problems. Parents and guardians will only be able to opt their student out of non-mandated educational units.





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More information and resources:  
[www.aclu-il.org/SexEd](http://www.aclu-il.org/SexEd)

